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Children <3 Communication

In 2012 the Swedish Exhibition Agency, in collaboration with the Barbacka Arts Centre [Kulturhuset Barbacka], established a national platform for the multidisciplinary scrutiny of children's culture. The platform was given the name "Children <3". Under the auspices of the platform, research, methodologies and good examples are highlighted in practical and theoretical activities.

In 2012 the focus was on communication. This book highlights ten experts who all have practical and theoretical expertise in this area. The book is primarily intended for press officers and others working in the communications field as well as those involved in dialogue at cultural institutions. In 2013 the focus is on visual art and the broadcasting media – radio and TV.

TEATER
CAFÉ
DANS
MUSIK



BARBACKA

KULTURHUSET

NITRE











































Dear reader!

An essential component of good culture for children – in its diverse forms and media – is good communication. Communication is a wide-ranging concept. Twenty years ago it was largely a matter of train timetables and motorways. Today it can comprise almost anything. Communication in the exhibition sphere expresses and communicates an identity or content, but even cultural activities are increasingly influenced by communication. Frequently the experience itself is communication.

This book is concerned with the dialogue that takes place with children prior to and following an encounter with a cultural institution. Children's habits regarding culture and media today and in the future form the basis for what can be communicated. But what demands are children going to make on tomorrow's cultural institutions? If we are going to produce good children's culture we surely need to answer this question. The book aims to shed light on and to spread information about the subject. We have invited experts in numerous fields to share their experiences with us.

The book is a contribution to a discussion as to how communication and dialogue for, with and to children can be formulated. What might it look like and what is its significance today and in the future? We are fully conscious of the fact that many aspects of our culture, including the exhibition medium that is our primary concern, have to do with communication. Accordingly, it is not just a very large field to scrutinize but also something that comprises numerous different views. We believe that one needs to create one's own understanding of communication with children within the limits set by one's own medium, knowledge and vision. If this book helps and inspires the reader to find the right course and, to some extent make the right decisions, then we shall have succeeded.

The child's encounters with our institutions and art forms sometimes take place outside our well-planned, dedicated premises before or after the visit. In our view it is often wise to think in as cross-border a manner as possible in the exhibition field. From our respective perspectives as communicators, curators and producers we have noted a need to achieve a wise and generous dialogue with children. And how difficult it can be to create such a dialogue.

For both the Barbacka Arts Centre and the Swedish Exhibition Agency, children and culture for children are priority operations. The Barbacka Arts Centre receives visitors on a daily basis and has a wide-reaching praxis. The Swedish Exhibition Agency is charged with developing the exhibition medium as well as generating meetings between professionals in the exhibition field.

With this introduction we wish all our readers every success with their own dialogue and communication with children. We believe that the answers to many questions about dialogue with children can be found among the people who work with children. Listen and let yourself be inspired by the knowledge and experience of these professionals.

We should like to thank all of the participating authors and the children and other adults who took part in the Children <3 Communication seminar held on 13–14 November 2012. We hope that we shall meet again before too long and that the book will prove a stimulating experience.

Tore Danielsson, Mathias Strömer &
Torjus Wrangell

- 34 What Do We Know About How Children Use the Media?
Catharina Bucht
- 40 Stop Trying to Interpret the World Through Your Own Children!
Fredrik Olsson
- 44 Provoke, Discuss, Dramatize!
Liza Fry
- 52 120 Years in the Service of Children
Lukas Björkman
- 60 Thoughts from the Stage
Harald Leander
- 66 Fumbies: The Cloud Creatures
Max Tiilikainen
- 72 Form and Function
Annika Thore
- 76 How Children Can Create Wonders!
Malin Fahlborg
- 80 *Culture Is Communication*
Birgitta Berntsson-Årje
- 84 The Key to Creating Space for and Together With Children
Eva-Johanna Isestig

What Do We Know About How Children Use the Media?

Catharina Bucht, from Nordicom, describes children's current media habits. How much radio, film and books do children actually consume and how do our institutions make use of this knowledge?

Many people who come into contact with children in one way or another and at one venue or another have probably reflected on the place which the media occupy in their lives. How much of their day do they devote to the media? Which media do they use? How has children's use of the media changed over time? There are facts and figures available!

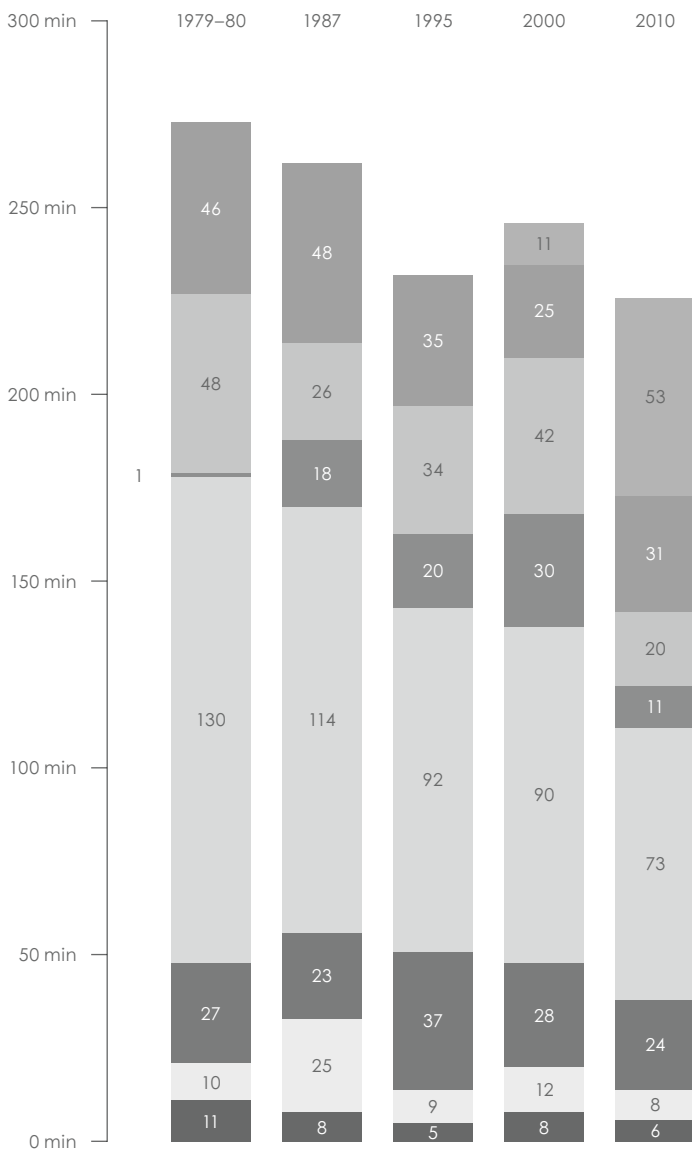
Nordicom – Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research – documents Nordic research and monitors the development of the media. Besides publishing reports and anthologies of current research in the field, we compile statistics on the population's access to and use of various media, partly through our own *Media Barometer* and partly through reports from elsewhere. Since 1997 there has

also been an international information centre focused on children and young people and the media via Nordicom, *The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media*. Every week Nordicom and the Clearinghouse receive a number of questions concerned with young people's media habits and the effects observable from new patterns of communication and new media technology. A central task of the operation is to disseminate available information and to help current research to become known.

Research in the field is important in providing a wide-ranging and expert knowledge that can, for example, be used for making policy decisions. Scientifically generated results help to ensure that political decisions are well-founded and that discussion and debate are more constructive if they are based on knowledge that is actually available.

One important source of knowledge about the use of media is provided by Nordicom's *Media Barometer*. The barometer is repeated every year and this makes it possible to study changes in media use over time. Nordicom has been responsible for the survey since 1994, but it was started some fifteen years earlier, in 1979, by the research department of Sweden's public radio service. With its thirty years of statistics, which are available to the general public, the survey is unique in the world.

Another survey that makes it possible to study the development of internet-use over time is published by the World Internet Institute. The annual report *Svenskarna och internet* [The Swedes and the Internet] first appeared in 2000. Yet another source is the Swedish



Media use per day by children
aged 9–14 over 30 years (Nordicom –
Sveriges Mediebarometer 1979–
2010).

- Internet
- Music
- Radio
- Video
- TV
- Books
- Magazines
- Newspapers

government's media survey entitled *Ungar och Medier* [Young People and the Media]. This has been carried out a number of times since 2005, focusing specifically on media use among young people aged 9–16 years. In 2010, media usage by children aged 2–9 was also surveyed in a study entitled *Småungar och medier* [Infants and the media].

Interesting aspects of media usage by young people in 2011 include:

- **MEDIA USAGE STARTS EARLY.** There are numerous TV programmes and films aimed at very young children. Internet usage also starts early with half of all three-year olds today making use of it. Initially internet usage is restricted, being mostly limited to games, video clips and play TV. As children get older and develop their abilities to read and write, their media usage becomes increasingly concerned with communication and with seeking information as well as social networking.
- **MULTITASKING**, i.e. using several media at the same time. The technology and the hardware enable people to listen to music, for example, at the same time as they are playing online and the TV is on in the background. People may also take a turn at chatting with a friend via some social network.
- **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN USING GAMES AND BLOGS.** Internet usage is fairly similar among boys and girls up to the ages of 8–9. After that there are larger

differences with game-playing being common among boys and blogging (reading other people's and writing one's own) being more common among girls as is being active in various social networks.

Has the adult world anything to offer the young people today who are sometimes described as being digital natives? Children are often not fazed by technology and they learn quickly, though they can also be relatively ignorant of the various possibilities of the internet and uncritical of the material that they come across. They naturally lack the wider knowledge of adults and the overview that comes with experience. Adults working with children in various capacities can, by showing interest, and by maintaining an open dialogue, gain a lot themselves. Media expertise – i.e. being able to analyse, evaluate, critically monitor and use the media – is important at all ages and we have much to learn from each other.

Links:

www.nordicom.gu.se

www.internetstatistik.se

Rapporten Svenskarna och internet

www.statensmedierad.se

Undersökningen Ungar och medier samt Småungar och medier

Publications:

Nordicom – Sveriges Mediebarometer

Barns och ungas medieanvändning i nätverkssamhället, red.

Ulla Carlsson

Stop Trying to Interpret the World Through Your Own Children!

Fredrik Olsson has the enviable task of taking responsibility for children's programming at Sveriges Radio – the Swedish public broadcasting organization. Fredrik seeks to navigate the way for radio broadcasting – which has a celebrated tradition in Sweden – into the future. How does he keep up with world events?

My band was on tour last summer and had just finished a somewhat bizarre performance at a festival in a forest outside the town of Nyköping in central Sweden. The audience had consisted of ten or so very drunk twenty year-olds together with the band from New York that was going to perform after us. So I had spoken English in my comments between numbers which, in retrospect, seems rather strange. We got into the tour bus that was going to take us home and, to cheer everybody up, I put on my favourite song: “Den blomstertid nu kommer” (a summer hymn known by everyone in Sweden) performed by Lill Lindfors (any granny's favourite singer) and Nils Landgren (jazz trombonist).

My band consists of a group of extreme musical nerds and we play a very specific type of alternative

pop music. “Den blomstertid nu kommer” did not receive a rapturous welcome. In fact things got so bad that one of the members of the band insisted on stopping so that he and I could get off the bus and settle the matter, claiming that “Lill Lindfors and Nils Landgren are not good music, Fredrik”.

“They certainly are”, I countered. “They are the best music I know.”

“No”, he said, “Lill Lindfors and Nils Landgren *do not make* good music”.

We carried on like that for a bit and he became increasingly provoked by me until we ultimately saw the Stockholm skyline on the horizon.

This entire example touches on something central that I have encountered in connection with culture for children. What is good and why is it good and how does one know that it is good?

In the bus on a summer night on our way home from Nyköping it was very easy to reflect on good taste. I like Lill Lindfors but my fellow member of the band does not. Even though we got increasingly angry with each other and progressively more childish, it would be easy to reach a consensus: Taste is like your butt.

But when it comes to culture for children, things get more complicated. Innumerable times and in the most varied contexts I have heard people arguing from the point of view of their own children or other children close to them: “I think that that idea for a programme is a bit too complicated, my daughter would not understand anything”, or “my neighbour on Gotland has a child and he thinks that what was shown was rather

embarrassing". I am allergic to this. I just want to scream: "Stop trying to interpret the world through your own children!"

So what do I do to avoid the situation where taste, in regard to my own radio productions, is ultimately a matter of the opinions of, flabby, white, middleclass young journalists?

I don't believe in inviting children interested in radio to take part in group discussions about taste. Broadcasts for children need to be more important than just a matter for people who are already initiates. On occasions I have made use of old friends in the teaching profession to visit school classes and have them listen to pilot productions and other radio programmes.

But what is the right method? What more should we be doing? I don't know. Which is why this feels like such an important issue. We need to find the perfect way of knowing *what* all the different children think is good, and *why* all the different children think that it is good.

To avoid misunderstandings I should also like to say that I really do want the flabby, white, middleclass young journalists to like what we produce too; they must definitely not be excluded.

People who believe in order may, in what I have written above, conclude that I think that we should remain totally passive in respect of children's taste. Such a person perhaps imagines that I am looking for productions that are more easily digested, that can easily be swallowed by a child. Such a person would be absolutely wrong.

But if an adult producer of children's culture is *not* responsible for one of the 810,464,052 clicks for *Justin Bieber's* "Baby" on Youtube in December 2012, perhaps even mispronounces *Justin Bieber*, and has perhaps never checked out *William Spetz* then, in my view, this producer of children's culture needs to sharpen up and devote a smidgeon of his or her attention to the world around.

Those of us who produce children's culture thus need to be aware of what children like and in what context their taste buds thrive. Only then can we offer the optimal mix of easily digested material at the same time that we challenge, develop and offer new angles. One might well term this *adult responsibility*.

As executive producer for a public-service broadcasting organization I want the children's material to suit each individual child. It should not matter at all whether one is fat and flabby, has parents with little education or enjoys Lill Lindfors. We must make productions that, in some manner, suit both our mass audience and the little individual. Note that I write that it must suit the audience, but it does not matter whether they hate it or love it; as long as they are not indifferent.

It is for this reason that we need to begin by finding out what is good and what is bad. We need to take taste and quality much more seriously in matters pertaining to productions for children than merely addressing children in our own little subgroup.

Provoke, Discuss, Dramatize!

Liza Fry is artistic director of Drömmarnas Hus the arts centre for youngsters in Malmö's Rosengård district. The centre, which succeeds in mixing performing arts with visual arts, earnestness with humour and adults with young people, must have unique methods for working with children and adolescents.

Global warming is a good thing! Just think how warm and nice it will be! We can start growing mangos and we won't have to go off on holiday. But what about the fish? Well, how many people actually like cod? How many have cod on their pizzas? It will be just as well if cod – and all the other fish – disappear.

The person responsible for these remarks was an imaginary politician (an actor) who went round to different schools in the southernmost province of Sweden where the pupils were not aware that they were watching a play.

We call such an event a provocation. We want to start our meeting with the children with a provocation in order to get a discussion going. We want the children to really sit up and take notice as we arouse their

curiosity. We want to show them that, as adults, we don't know everything and we are not always right. We want to show them that we need children's ideas and views and that their voices really count.

Provocation is the first step in a three-stage missile. The other two stages are:

2. EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES. Educational activities based on reactions to the provocation which will lead to the end production or goal.
3. END PRODUCTION/GOAL. A totality of the various creative refinements of the material – often a theatrical production.

BACK TO ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS

The pupils were prepared to ask the politician questions and had learnt a lot about the environmental threat prior to the meeting. At *Drömmarnas Hus* [House of dreams] the threat to the environment had been our theme for the year and we had agonized about how one might make such a theme entertaining and amusing. How can one prevent young people from feeling that there is nothing they can do to avert threats to the environment. We decided to invent a politician who was totally ignorant about the environment. There were mixed reactions to the politician.

A man in a suit enters the classroom talking nonchalantly in his phone and, in due course, talking with the pupils. He explains that he has driven to the school at great speed. Because if one drives fast one emits less exhaust fumes because the journey takes less time.

When the pupils realize that he understands nothing about the current environmental threat they react with a sense of delighted alarm. There is a lot of giggling in the classroom. Pupils roll their eyes in amazement. After a while they have all realized that they are witnessing a fiction but they wish they could remain in their initial reaction of “just think if it is true and he is for real”. Our time with the children began with laughter and enjoyment.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Our politician presented himself to the pupils in due course as one of our cultural educators and explained to them that what they had witnessed was known as hidden theatre. He also explained why we choose to begin in this way.

Following discussion about what the politician actually said there was a play and a lesson with a theme for pupils to write about. When the cultural educator had left, the class teacher took over and, together with the pupils, tried to produce a plan for change. How can one improve the environment in the school and in the city where one lives?

In the meantime, we from Drömmarnas Hus asked ourselves what had happened to the “threatened species” like the mythical river horse, fairies or other little people? Had one’s children heard about such beings?

We decided to invite the children we had worked with to Fulltofta which is a wooded area in the middle of the province of Skåne.

Helped by some of our cultural educators the children sought for traces of these little people. We built a house for them on the bog (since the previous one had been damaged in a flood) and we helped the river horse to find healing water.

Down on the bog one could often hear children shouting out: “I saw something, it was a fairy running away!”. Sometimes someone would hear a pixy in a hole in a tree stump.

In nature we tried to work out how a modern river horse would behave. What strengths and weaknesses do the fairy queen and the pixies of today have?

The descriptions of these characters formed the basis for a dramatic production that we called “Väsen – ett vidunderligt spektakel” [Spirits of nature, a remarkable spectacle].

FINAL PRODUCTION

During the educational activities we became aware that there would not only be a theatrical production but also an environmental convention. We naturally felt obliged to present the proposals that our pupils had developed

to the people who have the opportunity to make changes, i.e. the politicians.

And so we had to create a meeting place for politicians and children: An environment convention. This was not something we had budgeted for but we felt obliged to undertake the convention in order to remain true to the children and to ourselves. We had to seek more financial support. Just think of what politicians might learn from the children's numerous ideas for change! We were proud to be able to open the doors for the convention at the Hässleholm arts centre. A convention full of young delegates from all over Skåne who had fantastic proposals for improvements to the environment.

WHAT ABOUT THE DRAMATIC PRODUCTION?

Dear human beings! It is vitally important that you attend the Moorish Palace at the annual ceremony of the magic tree. We really need you there.

– The Old Guardian

That was our invitation to “Väsen” which was an interactive drama. The story takes place in a fairy-tale forest with a magic tree which all sorts of magic beings inhabit. The play is about how, together, we can put a stop to the greedy beings who want to plunder the magic tree of its resources.

The main character is a pixie who has been chosen by the old guardian as the new keeper of the magic tree.





In his guardian's rod was an inscription telling him to enlist the help of all the children present in order to save the enchanted tree and its magical powers. As thanks for their help, the old guardian appointed all the children to be new guardians of the land. As proof of this they received a magic stone (part of the guardian's rod).

We performed "Väsen" for almost 10,000 children. This article is an attempt to describe how, at Drömmarnas Hus, we communicate with children of various ages. We start by provoking a reaction in order to generate ideas and feelings on a theme. We then submit them to educational techniques and we make use of the results in a final production which is often a theatrical performance and, in the present instance, a convention on the environment.

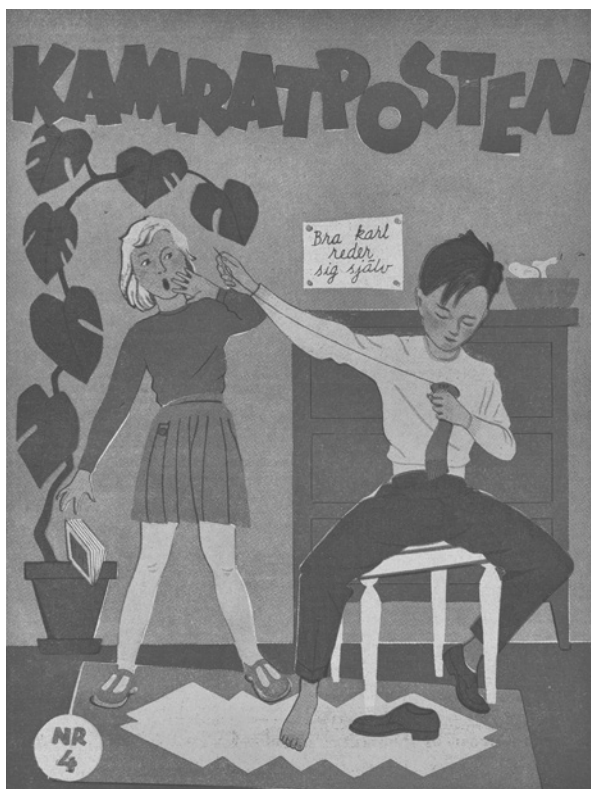
A year or so ago we heard a report about green school playgrounds where the children planted trees. When the interviewer asked the children why they were doing this they replied with one voice: "Because we are guardians of the land". Another child explained that he still kept his piece of the guardian's rod under his pillow.

120 Years in the Service of Children

Lukas Björkman, editor of the Swedish children's magazine *Kamratposten*, really knows what children go for. For more than 120 years the magazine has received a flood of letters from children and it keeps very close to the expectations of its readership.

The Swedish children's newspaper *Kamratposten*, which was originally called *Folkskolans barntidning*, was founded in 1892 by a teacher named Stina Quint. In her view, schoolchildren did not read enough and there were too few children's books available. With the new newspaper she aimed to create "a book that never ends"; an ambition that surely succeeded. 120 years after the start, *Kamratposten* has some 55,000 subscribers, about 180,000 readers and a website (KPwebben) that is visited by 10,000 different individuals each week. The paper also receives about 4,000 mails each week. Almost all of the newspaper's readers are aged from 8 to 14 years.





There are three principal reasons for the success of the newspaper:

1. Persuading children to want to read at a general level and to want to read *Kamratposten* in particular. This is a matter of how one writes. But also of choice of subjects; that is, of knowing what children want to read about.
2. Letting children be heard and listening to other people's views in the newspaper and on the website. This is a matter of creating situations where children want their views about big issues and small to appear in public. And those who want to be anonymous must be allowed to withhold their names from publication.
3. Answering children's questions seriously. That is, taking the issues seriously and not giving up until one has produced fitting and intelligible answers.

How does one gain the trust of one's readers? Most important of all is that *Kamratposten* should always be respectful. No one who reads it should risk damaging their self-esteem. Respect is something that pervades the publication and is something that the editorial staff work on. Another important aspect is that the paper is for *both* girls and boys. This is something that most of our readers appreciate. Unisex newspapers aimed at children and youngsters are fairly unusual which may seem a trifle strange in the year 2012. But that is the state of the market.

Back to Miss Quint. She ran the paper until sometime in the 1920s when she died. True, even in her day, there were some humorous anecdotes and puzzles in the newspaper. But, basically, it was concerned with fearing God, how to behave while growing up, and love of one's native land.

During World War II the paper took the view that children should be protected from the horrors of war. And so it contained nothing about what was happening in the world. Today we would have reported on the war and explained the situation in each number.

In 1950 the paper changed its name to become *Kamratposten*. The cover was now in full colour and one can perceive more of a child's perspective. There was more material submitted by children and more articles about children doing interesting things. But the gender roles were still cemented into those applying in society in general. In the competitions, for example, there were always different prizes for girls and boys. What an alarming thought – that a girl might win a football!

Towards the end of the 1960s, *Kamratposten* became a more radical paper. The mode of address changed somewhat and there was an early, though clearly noticeable, interest in gender equality. In 1968 the paper started a sex column. This caused a scandal, particularly in the more religious areas of society. The sex column still exists today under the heading *Kropp & Knopp* [Body & Mind], but nowadays it is much more concerned with puberty and feelings than on sex. If one asks previous subscribers from the 1980s onwards what they remember from the paper, more than half of them

SEX ÄR DET NÅGOT ATT PRATA OM ?

"Skulle ni inte kunna sätta in lite om sexualkunskap? Lite djärvare sagt: Det är er skyldighet (de vuxnas) att ge oss kunskap om sex. Här går man och blir äldre och äldre (11 år) och vet fortfarande lika litet."

Ja, så stod det i ett långt brev från en flicka som ville att Kamratposten skulle skriva om "hur människan blir till och om pojkens och flickans samspel".

— Jag tycker det är min skyldighet att skriva detta brev och hjälpa mina kamrater att klara sig ur den här härvan (när man är mellan 11 och 18 år), skrev hon.

FOTO: ANDRE LAFOLIE



1. NILS-ÅKE



2. HELENA



3. GUNVOR



4. CARIN



5. MALTE


EN härva — massor av problem; frågor som man inte får svar på. Kanske för att man inte har någon att fråga. Inte någon man *törs* prata med. Kompisarna vet inte mer än man själv. Föräldrarna vill inte tala om sex eller kommer bara med allmänna förmaningar. Lärarna hafsar över undervisningen i sexualkunskap. Är det fortfarande så? Vi bjöd in några pojkar och flickor till redaktionen och satte oss kring "runda bordet" och pratade om sex. De som pratade var Carin, Gunvor, Helena, Nils-Åke och Malte. Med oss var också Maj-Briht Bergström-Walan. Hon är sexpedagog och undervisar om sex i skolorna, håller föredrag och skriver böcker och artiklar.

Sex i skolan — Det är dåligt med sexundervisningen i skolan. Läraren bara rodnar och säger nästan ingenting. Man får bara veta lite om hur barn blir till. Ungefär så sa både Gunvor, Helena och Nils-Åke. I en klass skulle eleverna få skriva frågor på lappar, men lärarna slängde lapparna i papperskorgen. Carin var den enda som fått bra och ordentlig undervisning. Malte hade varit sjuk när de hade haft sexualundervisning, men i hans skola finns en lärare som eleverna kan fråga om allt, och han hade pratat sex med eleverna.

— Sexualundervisningen borde vara
(Forts på sid 4)

Kamrat
POSTEN

NR 8. APRIL 1961 ÅRGÅNG 70

Följ
KP:s
 **FOTBOLLSSKOLA**
från början

sid 9

Du kan läsa om
PAW infödingspojken

sid 10-11



mention the *Kropp & Knopp* column. And nothing suggests that interest in this field is declining.

Since the 1970s the paper has increasingly dealt with items that are of current interest in society. Trends, idols and fashion ideas. It is a matter of dealing with all the things that children talk about and that they are concerned about. And of explaining all the things that children hear adults discussing. This is roughly where we find ourselves today too. Add to this the children's own letters to the paper and their stories, together with a couple of comic strips, and you have *Kamratposten* in a nutshell.

The most popular subjects among readers in 2012: love, idols, animals, music, puberty. And candy.

Tips for adults wanting to write for children:

- Use short sentences. (It is permissible to begin sentences with “And” and “But”.)
- Avoid difficult words – or explain them.
- Focus. Take out interesting side-lines.
- Always read through what you have written – preferably out loud.
- Each of us has an inner 11 year-old. Ask it for help.
- Talk to children and read what children write. Can't find what you are looking for? Surf, or read KP!
- Take all subjects seriously.
- Dare to be humorous, but *don't* try to be cool.

Links:
www.kpwebben.se

Thoughts from the Stage

Harald Leander contributes reflections from the world of children's theatre and communicates all sorts of skills without deciding himself what they are to be used for.

Radu Penciulescu the Romanian professor who taught me acting at the Malmö Theatre Academy some 25 years ago, used sometimes to quote an architect he knew very well. Throughout his successful professional career, the architect had refused to design schools. Anything else he had readily immersed himself in but schools he had avoided. He claimed that it was far too difficult a task to speculate as to what coming generations might need. A task like that could only be successfully undertaken by a younger person, preferably a child! All that the architect could contribute would be his technical knowledge. He could show the child *how* one draws plans but did not want to decide *what* was to be designed.

My professor raised this idea when we were discussing how the education of tomorrow's actors should

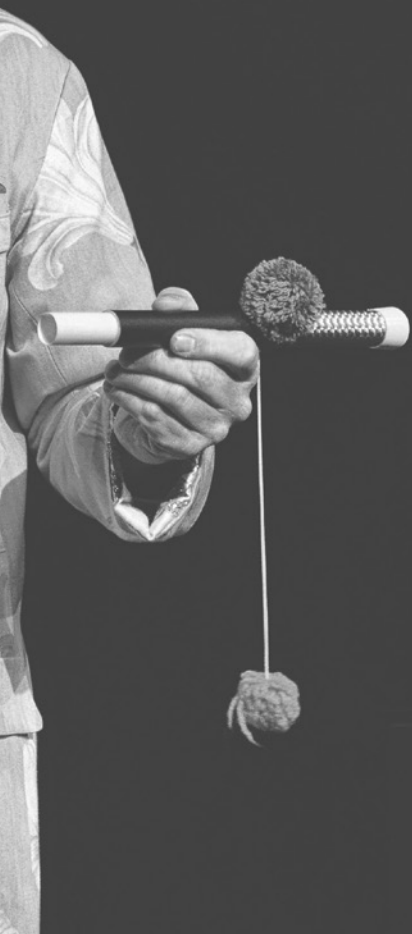
be planned and carried out. A course for actors can discuss, and can try to teach, objective, technical skills, but it should avoid trying to teach what these skills should be used for. Only the actors of tomorrow can determine this. And he added that one can, naturally, explain how these objective skills have hitherto been used. But an acting training should not attempt to go further than this.

At the panel discussion at the seminar on children and communication held in Kristianstad, the initial question was what demands children will make with regard to tomorrow's cultural institutions. As moderator of the discussion I had the architect's views in my pocket. But I had no reason for getting them out, because the discussion went in a different direction and both the panel and the audience generally avoided ending up in speculation about what our future will primarily need. Rather, the day comprised both reports and discussions about the essential parameters for the future: experiences, technology and current status.

But what should those of us who are creative artists, or communicators in the arts, be discussing with children today? And how should we undertake this discussion? My own experience is mainly from the performing arts where I work as a dramatist, director and actor, often with audiences of children or young people.

Despite the fact that children's theatre in Sweden deservedly enjoys an international reputation for its quality, it is frequently regarded as something of a poor relation both in the theatre and elsewhere. With some exceptions, theatre for children is produced by groups





that are not part of the public institutions. Children's theatre is undertaken by people who can't establish themselves in the "real" theatre. Children's theatre produced by independent theatre groups is badly financed and often relies on a large voluntary input.

Those of us who, in spite of the difficulties, insist on producing theatre for children and young people, do this mostly because we believe in its importance. We are convinced that children's theatre means extensive artistic freedom, greater creative possibilities and a greater and more realistic sense of responsibility.

Theatre for children and young people is seldom merely art for art's sake. It needs to maintain the ambition of actively and seriously communicating with its public, not just being viewed and admired. I feel sure that every institution that produces adult theatre would claim to have the same ambition though, when I survey the field, I become less certain that they really embrace this ambition.

But we cannot, like the architect or the professor, step back and show *how* one performs in the theatre – The result could well be merely theatre to be viewed and admired. Theatre needs also to be *about* something. But does that not just make us speculative? We consider that children *need to experience* this and that. Or worse still: that children *must learn* this or that in the theatre. It is not unusual for people working in children's theatre to have to defend themselves against ideas about the "beneficial" aspect from the (possibly well-intentioned) adult world. Plays about bullying, drugs, integration and so on. And there are, of course, well-made plays

and successful productions that address the audience in this straightforward manner. But I have difficulty in arousing any enthusiasm for projects of this type.

I believe that theatre that is associative has a much greater influence. Theatre in which the artistic expression has much more room and more freedom in its own right. It can portray worlds that are like our own but that are *not* ours. It can relate narratives that are far beyond our everyday experiences, yet that are still highly relevant to us. But theatre is most fragile and most hazardous when it attempts to *be* our world and our everyday experiences.

And so I want to communicate narratives, images and moods that entertain, interest and engage me myself on the children's theatre stage. With the conviction that *this* is what taking children seriously is about. And it is only then that I will be taken seriously by the children. But I can hold hands with both the architect and the professor. For just as a younger person completes the design of the school building and tomorrow's theatrical staff employ acting techniques, so our children's audience – as the excellent dramaturges that they are – will make our narratives their own, preserving the images and using them for whatever they want.

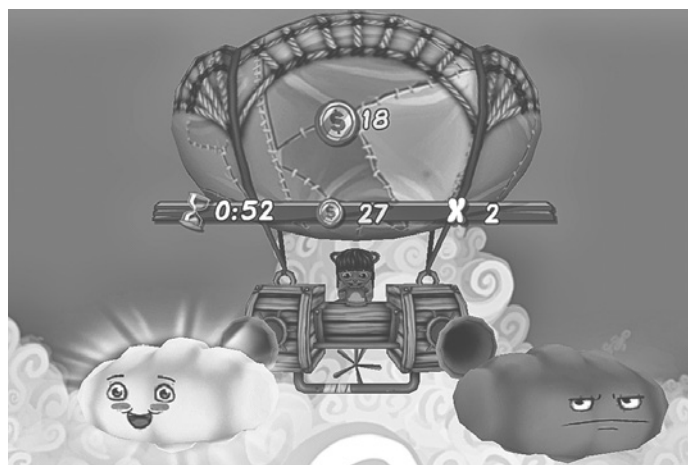
Fumbies: The Cloud Creatures

Max Tiilikainen writes about digital culture. The games media attract children from their youngest years. How are games constructed and what relations to non-digital culture are important?

Meow Entertainment makes game applications for smartphones for children and adults. Our business model is called “free-to-play” and this means that all our games can be downloaded and played from beginning to end free of charge but it costs real money, for example, to buy a better sofa for one’s digital home or to make faster progress and maybe unlock the next level straight away instead of being obliged to play for a specified time. “Fumbies: The Cloud Creatures”, is a game of this sort which we have developed together with our publisher, Beeline Interactive Inc.

The game has been released for iPhones, iPads and iPod Touch. But our journey really began when we focused on getting out the game for use on a different platform. We wanted to build and release “Fumbies”





on Facebook. This was because similar products were already available on the platform, notably “pet” games, which are games in which one looks after a digital household pet.

It was only when we met our publisher that iPhones became interesting. Our publisher was living proof that smartphones were the right platform both for a younger audience and for older, adult players. Facebook did not have, nor does it now have, such a large player base among children (10 and under), so that for us smartphones represented a wider and larger audience than what we saw in connection with Facebook.

When we design games we think a very great deal about the target group and what this group of people likes to play or engage with. It is incredibly important for us to design a game for our audience and not for ourselves. If we fail in this we risk creating a game that simply cannot be played by the group we are targeting. The game may be too difficult, has the wrong graphics, is not cute enough, does not have interesting items to be consumed, scares off a certain category of people because it is too pink, and so on. In the games that we have created so far, we have had a target group consisting of both adults and children. “Fumbies: The Cloud Creatures” is aimed at girls from 7–17 and women from 18–30. How are we able to focus both on 7 year-olds and 30 year-olds? The game naturally contains elements that are more suitable for children than for adults and there are minor aspects of the game that may well be more appreciated by adults than by children. But in general terms, the design of the game is not influenced

by the age difference. What works for adults also works for children. If one keeps the mechanics as simple as possible and presents the information in as logical a manner as possible with a simple control method, the game will achieve our goal: That almost anyone should be able to pick up the game and play it through without any problems at all.

But, it must be added, the “fun” aspect of a game can vary from person to person. For example, in “Fumbies” many younger children like washing, soaping and throwing balls with their Fumbies. While older players are more interested in buying and decorating their houses and ensuring that their Fumbies are on the highest possible “level”.

For us it is extremely important to have different aspects to a game in which a specific mechanism attracts a specific type of player without the mechanism frightening off a different type of player. Everything is, of course, a matter of balance, and there is always a risk that we shall frighten off one type of player for the benefit of another. But by taking careful steps and undertaking fruitful analyses we find our way. And if we fail to do so, then we have to return to the drawing board.

Visually almost everyone likes “cute” creatures. True, there is a level of cuteness that might be construed as “childish”. But one can design cute games that appeal both to adults and children. It’s all a matter of getting the aesthetic right. But that’s another story.

Links:

www.meow-entertainment.com

Form and Function

Annika Thore is one of all the talented people in the cultural sphere who devote themselves to children's culture. Children's books, theatre, museums, exhibitions – together with her companion Fred Lindfors, Annika runs the Form and Funktion agency which is concerned with most aspects of culture for children.

I am a set designer and I work with narrative settings for children in a variety of contexts. I run Form och Funktion [Form and Function] with my husband, Fred Lindfors. We design, engineer, and make sets in our workshop in Haninge outside Stockholm. As a set designer I have always been interested in encounters between different art forms and I produce exhibitions, venues where children can play, books, and creative workshops for children.

Soon to be shown in public art galleries and libraries is my play exhibition entitled “Vardagens trassligheter” [Everyday entanglements]. The exhibition is based on my own drawings of piles of things at home and everyday entanglements which I have converted into fun settings for children to play in. For the very





youngest children I also produce books together with my sister. We are currently completing the last two of a series of small books about small people and small, playful, everyday situations. For somewhat older children, during the coming autumn I shall produce set designs and costumes for a stage production about being sisters which will tour with the theatre company *Teater tre*.

If I try to understand how and why I work so much with children I think that this is because of my delight in playing and in little humorous details in a larger context. I immerse myself in the parameters of a project, trying to work practically with the smaller details. I break down and simplify a narrative in order to find a pleasurable way in. All my projects begin with a casual bundle of papers full of little drawings and odd words. Based on the drawings I then build models. I like dealing with difficulties like strange corridors, cramped touring vehicles and cunning manuscripts. I make drawings from the models and we then build the set in our workshop. But it is precisely the attractive entry to the narrative that I want to keep. This is also the way that I want audiences to absorb my settings. Being attracted in a playful manner to something interesting that is able to grow and to turn into a much larger narrative.

I very much believe in direct, sensual experiences and I often try to avoid too much explanatory text. This way of working has become my best and most enjoyable way of telling stories to children.

How Children Can Create Wonders!

Malin Fahlborg is a teacher and has wonderful opportunities for meeting children every day. As the person responsible for Underverkstan, which is the Barbacka Arts Centre's space for children's own creativity, Malin is one of the people concerned with shaping future methodologies for children's artistic creativity. How does she approach this?

The Wonder Workshop is one of the activities at the Barbacka Arts Centre situated centrally in the southern Swedish town of Kristianstad. It started in the autumn of 2012. I had the honour of taking charge of the activity. Based on my experience of schools where I work as an art teacher I realized that this new operation would be really worthwhile. By using my contacts, visiting schools, sending information home in contact books and conducting creative workshops at after-school centres we succeeded in reaching our target group – children aged 7–12 years.

The result is, that between the hours of 13.30–16.30 every Saturday, 10–15 happy and expectant children turn up in the art room of the Barbacka Arts Centre ready to get creative. In the art room I have

laid out materials suited to the day's main activities. I explain to the children how I think that they can use the materials and I show them examples of things that I and my family have made at home. I explain that they are free to use the material in any way they like and that they can ask me if they need something else in order to complete their own ideas. This introduction and inspiration is always followed by an explosion of creativity. The atmosphere in the art room is calm and everyone contributes to making the afternoon a success.

A short break for refreshments gives me a suitable opportunity for presenting some further ideas that they can consider when they have finished with the main activity. If any of the children have developed their own ideas I show what they have done (if they will let me) to the others.

In this way the children inspire each other. At the *Wonder Workshop* they are permitted to copy each other and we talk about how one can see it as flattering that someone else wants to copy what I have been doing. Thinking in this way seems natural. This is often how we learn things and that we develop.

In the world of school the thinking is different. At school pupils need to have lots of ideas and to be able to work independently if they are to achieve the highest grades. Another difference is that at school one does not have the same opportunities for departing from the fixed framework, as the teacher is influenced by the syllabus, educational planning, the size and number of the classes and the brevity of lessons. And at school pupils do not get to choose whether they want to take part or not.

Being surrounded by children who have a joint interest in creative activities and who choose to spend their free time doing something where no one makes any specific demands on them and that they enjoy feels like a real luxury. It is not an exaggeration for me to claim that in the *Wonder Workshop* it is the children who are the wonder and they are responsible for the *wonders* that take place there.

When planning the activities, I have to take into account the fact that it is not always the same children that turn up each week. The children can either buy a membership card (300 SEK for 12 sessions) or can turn up as they want and pay for single sessions (30 SEK per session). This means that whatever we start on we also finish during the session.

I am responsible for planning the sessions and ordering the materials. And I have to ensure that we use a range of different materials and techniques. I have tried letting the children influence what we do by getting them to draw simple pennants which we hung up in the room. However, they were very pleased with what we had already done and this is what they expressed on the pennants.

Culture *Is* Communication

Birgitta Berntsson-Ärje is one of the people who really make communication and dialogue with children possible. She works as a cultural officer in Trollhättan, a model municipality in the field of children's culture with the N3 children's arts centre as the flagship.

When, many years ago now, I was studying cultural education in the town of Gävle I started thinking seriously about what we mean by the notion of culture. However I approached the matter I could not get away from the thought that culture is a part of our everyday lives and, in fact, our entire existence. This must surely be one of the reasons why it sometimes seems so difficult to explain what culture is and what it is for.

Some ten years ago I was appointed cultural secretary with responsibility for undertaking a major programme known as *Kulturbyrån* [Culture Office] for children and youngsters in the nursery schools and grade schools in Trollhättan. Once again this challenged me to try to define and reflect on culture, particularly as applied to children. In order to clarify

matters, I simply struck out everything that was culturally related in order to see what was left. And what was left turned out to be a freezing, naked, hungry, and solitary being in the middle of nature. And another such solitary being a little further away, and then another. They may have had some instincts but that was about all. Without culture it was a matter of looking for food, finding some way of warming oneself and some form of shelter. In due course people presumably realized that it was a little easier to survive if one cooperated and things worked best if one could communicate. This situation led to the development of language, clothing, housing and a complete society. We also wanted to tell each other about our experiences and our feelings and even to leave traces in history for the future. And so learning and art developed.

As new beings, while we are growing up we go through all these evolutionary phases and this means that the most important thing must be to learn to communicate as widely as possible.

This principle is inscribed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but how well is it observed? Does every child, while growing up, have the opportunity to learn the means of communication that human beings use? Means that can be used to dominate others in the worst instance. For who has not felt inferior when faced with bureaucratic language, or felt confused and awkward in a group of people who have a dress code that differs entirely from one's own?

Everyone has the right to a knowledge of the existence of all this everyday communication, whether it be

clearly expressed or sublimely hidden, and that one can learn to understand and use it. This is the fundamental democratic principle.

Art is one of the best educational aids in respect of learning about communication. A concentrated form of communication, expressed in different works, provides the basis for reflection, discussion and, ultimately, ways into one's own mode of expression.

In the end it is an educational approach to culture where one can use almost anything as a part of a process: > *sensory impression* > *processing* > *desire to express* > *choice of mode of expression* > *formulation/ expression* > *recipient's expression*. Here the cultural educator takes her pupil by the hand and leads her on to making her own discoveries and formulations of knowledge and experience.

This is precisely what we work with at N3 in Trollhättan. Here the local politicians have determined that it is important for children to be able to enjoy experiences and to take part in creative activities while they are growing up. My primary task in connection with *Kulturbyrån* is to give the children artistic experiences and opportunities to meet with cultural educators who can act as guides throughout their school careers from first grade to ninth grade. This applies to all the children in Trollhättan giving a total of some 13,000 experience occasions during a year with at least 16 cultural educators giving these children and young people opportunities to try out a variety of forms of expression in a secure and relaxed atmosphere.

If the children decide that they want to learn more about a particular form of expression they can attend N3 in their own spare time. There we run courses and children can both learn more and display their skills in a variety of forums.

At N3 the adults are not there to say how things are to be done but they are responsive and listen to the children's own wishes. We meet children and young people in their own dreams and desires, helping them to express themselves, experimenting with modes of expression, arranging for other youngsters to use their capacities and to develop their delight in communication and creating their own future. Achieving autonomy as human beings, quite simply. At N3 we are proud to be able to do this for our children and young people in Trollhättan.

The Key to Creating Space for and Together With Children

Eva-Johanna Isestig has a job description like almost no one else. She literally has the unique position as child culture designer at White Architects. She designs and creates spaces for children and young people in which involvement, a holistic experience and sustainability form a three-pronged impact that museums and exhibitions could readily learn from.

Once upon a time... there was a group of inquisitive children who discovered a mysterious place that seemed to be a research laboratory with numerous different rooms – both large and small – as well as huts and stages. It was a unique place where one could meet friends whom one would not, perhaps, have met otherwise. One could explore the content of thousands of books, one could fantasize and could become inspired to play around with narrative techniques. The children chose to call this place “Balagan”.

This is how the story of Balagan begins – or perhaps it begins in a completely different way. We can decide ourselves. Balagan is a story-telling experiment, a place where Malmö’s youngsters (ages 9–12) can explore narrative techniques, or just hang out. It can also

be described as a transmedial game which, in this case, means that the operation exists in both the physical and digital domains. There are two different, interactive platforms that offer activities and opportunities for children from different perspectives.

The word Balagan means chaos and can be found in both Russian and the Georgian language. In my view, there is too much structure in children's daily lives, principally during school hours, but also in leisure activities and at home. I want to give children a taste of chaos that will enable them to create a structure of their own, a chaos that facilitates imaginative games.

Balagan was created by staff from the Malmö Municipal Library together with Kidding design studio which, at the time, consisted of interaction designer Sara Stiber and myself. I am currently working as a designer of children's culture at White Architects. Basically I am an interior designer and I have an MA in Child Culture Design from HDK School of Crafts and Design at Gothenburg University.

What a child culture designer involves can be explained by considering the elements separately.

CHILD – working with children as one's target group, i.e. everyone between the ages of 0 and 18. My task is to represent the children and to work for their interests. By involving children in the design process I get to understand what their real needs look like. These needs are then met architecturally and with activities.

CULTURE – refers to what is usually termed the social science meaning of the word, i.e. a pattern of living. It is a matter of how children and young people live their everyday lives, how they perceive their surroundings, all their activities, interests and thoughts; their entire world of ideas. How children learn things, develop, get to know the world and how children play.

DESIGN – with my background as an interior designer I always work in an intimate scale in the projects that I am involved in, though not necessarily indoors, nor in a small perspective. Design can be a matter of anything from urban planning, designing parks and squares as well as public buildings like schools, hospitals and cultural institutions, to designing furniture and other products. For me, design is a matter of planning an operation together with its activities.

CHILD CULTURE DESIGN

Working as a child culture designer is all about planning and designing environments for and with children and young people. The environments must help to promote children's learning and general development. And so an understanding of different educational philosophies and learning processes is also essential. But the most important knowledge has to do with methods. One needs to find and plan suitable modes of communication for specific issues so that children can let us adults understand their world.

GETTING INVITED INTO THE WORLD OF THE CHILD

If one is to be invited into the children's world one has first to gain their trust. My tool chest contains numerous different types of exercises for different forms of communication that enable children to express their thoughts, desires and needs. In these exercises we establish a common language, get to know each other, and are able to create on the basis of a common platform. Every exercise is, in reality, a means of communicating and is designed to be adaptable to different sorts of issues and to children's varying communicative abilities.

GETTING INVOLVED THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PROCESS

In connection with each exercise there is naturally an analysis and interpretation where I, as designer, transform children's ideas into the necessary documentation for the design process such as the stipulated requirements, drawings, prototypes, questionnaires, construction documents and final evaluation. Exercises enable children to take part and to formulate the content of these documents. The exercises can take various forms, everything from material workshops to inspirational outdoor walks, and can be adapted to suit the context of the project. That children participate in the creative process is important at all stages.

In developing Balagan we involved the children throughout the design process and communication has been a central aspect at all stages. When working

with children (and adults) it is important to give visual expression to ideas and concepts as early as possible through images, models or some other physical material. The opposite approach of merely using words leaves a great deal of room for misinterpretation. This may sound slightly contradictory, but it is also important to keep these physical forms of ideas “open” as long as possible so that children feel that their comments and proposals are welcome throughout the process.

It is also important to offer a wide range of exercises because we are all different. For some people the best way of communicating is being spontaneous, quick, direct and in company with lots of people. For other people the best way is reflecting and working things out on one's own. If one is going to invite everyone then one needs to be able to offer all sorts of modes of communication. We have to be curious and attentive, daring to try out other ways of communicating.



Examples of how previous thoughts by children were analysed and interpreted, initially in connection with the Balagan concept, can be visualized as a basis for discussion.



Cocoon/Stage



Parkour



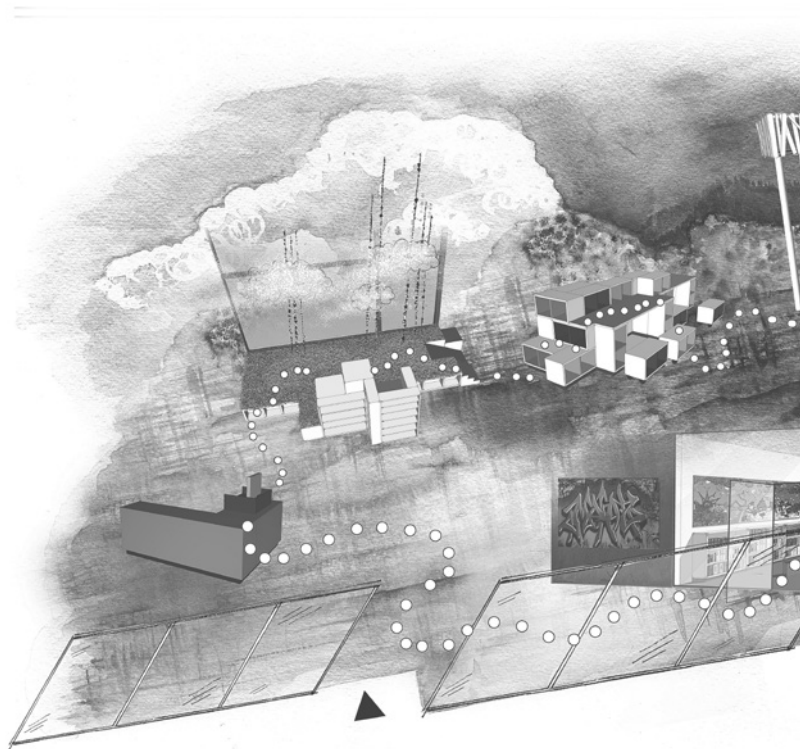
Storytelling



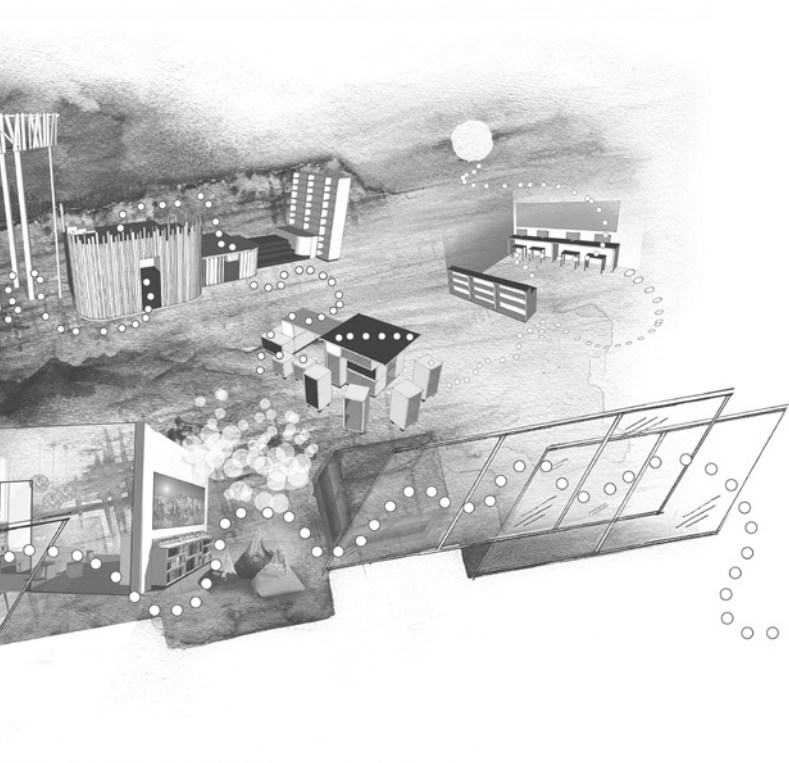
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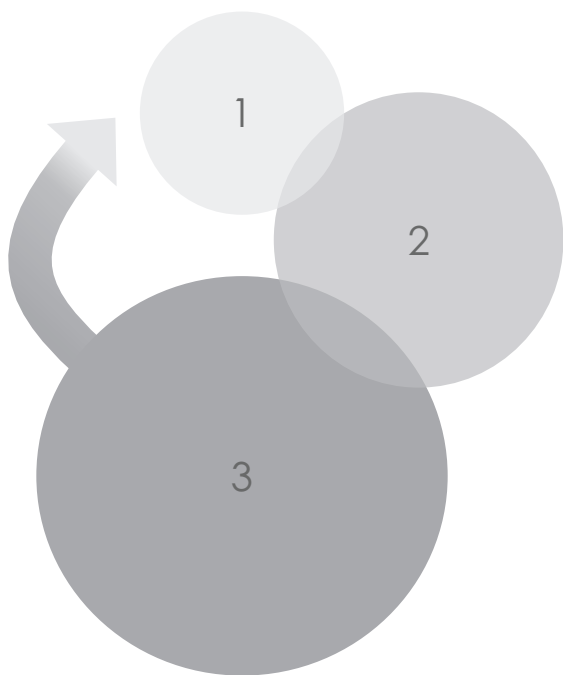
WHAT IS ONE'S RESPONSIBILITY AS CO-CREATOR?

When one invites children to take part one needs to be very clear about what their role means and what they will gain from participating. For example, one must avoid giving false expectations or formulating tasks that the child finds too demanding. We adults need to pay attention to the signals that we transmit and to be aware of what we are doing; not promising things that we cannot deliver. One of Balagan's important tasks is to inspire children to read using narrative. We wanted Balagan to be designed on the basis of the children's references and to offer meaningful activities. And we also wanted both the physical space and the website to be a unified operation and communication. In order to achieve this, both on paper and in practice, there was a need for cooperation throughout the cultural institution and the municipality (in this case the municipal library and the local arts department). Having a clear idea about communication is also decisive with regard to the specific elements that the communication is to consist of, both visually and from the point of view of content, as well as the scenario to be followed. Formulating a model of communication that everyone is agreed upon facilitates collaboration.



Example of how I work with children using an alternative type of plans (also with the entire project group, staff and others involved such as suppliers and producers) to retain the feeling, the mood and the desired experience of Balagan. And in order to get away from the image of a standard type of plan in which one uses excluding types of communication.





1. Before the visit = Interest
2. During the visit = Experience
3. After the visit = Publicizing

Example of what a communication model can look like. This particular one gives a picture of how tasks are assigned depending on the event, the weight attached to the communication activities after the visit based on the children's experience and memory of activities in the physical space or on the website. And least attention is paid to the operation prior to the children visiting the website or the physical space. Normally the reverse is true.

For those of us working with Balagan it is, therefore, self-evident that narration is the central element of our communication plan. At the official opening of Balagan in June 2012 we wanted to create an atmosphere of narrating right from the start. Project manager Andreas Ingefjord took the role of an explorer and he presented a narrative history of the mystery surrounding Balagan: the sort of place it is and what the different rooms in the fantasy can be inspired by. With the opening, Balagan was given to the children with just one story begun and a few frames and now the children can take over the narrative and the design of what Balagan can be. “There are as many stories on the way to Balagan as there are children who have helped us to reach our goal”, Andreas maintains. And there are just as many stories about what Balagan can become as there are children in Malmö.

Balagan is a project that can be used as an example of how communication for and with children can function throughout the development process and in running the operation on a daily basis.



Riksställningar
Swedish Exhibition
Agency